

## Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 EA-10 ISO-00 IGA-02 OMB-01  
TRSE-00 AID-05 OES-07 IO-13 L-03 NSC-05 SP-02  
SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 HEW-04  
CA-01 MED-02 /105 W  
-----070364 130614Z /23

R 130341Z SEP 77  
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9193  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
DOD WASHDC/DMA  
HQ WASHDC/DAJA-IA

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 6405

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: MARR, MY  
SUBJECT: STATUS OF U.S. ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH UNIT (USAMRU)-KUALA  
LUMPUR

REF: STATE 126080 (DTG 011956Z JUN 77)

1. THE U.S. ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH UNIT, KUALA LUMPUR, HAD  
ITS ORIGINS IN 1948 WHEN RESEARCHERS FROM THE U.S. ARMY  
MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND COLLABORATED WITH  
SCIENTISTS (CIVILIANS) AT THE INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH  
(IMR) HERE TO EVALUATE THE EFFICACY OF CHLORAMPHENICOL IN  
THE TREATMENT OF SCRUB TYPHUS. DURING THE EARLY YEARS THE  
ASSIGNMENT OF AMERICANS TO THE RESEARCH PROGRAM WAS ON A  
TEMPORARY (ANNUAL) BASIS. IN 1953, THROUGH AN EXCHANGE OF  
LETTERS WITH THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA GOVERNMENT, THE U.S.  
ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH UNIT WAS ESTABLISHED AT THE IMR  
FOR AN INITIAL PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. THE UNIT  
CONTINUES TO OPERATE AS AN ASSOCIATED  
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PART OF THE IMR, WHICH IN TURN IS UNDER THE MINISTRY  
OF HEALTH, UNDER A GRANT FROM THE U.S. ARMY RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND TO THE DIRECTOR, IMR. THE  
GRANT CURRENTLY IS APPROXIMATELY \$400,000 ANNUALLY.  
DIRECT SUPPORT IS ALSO PROVIDED BY WALTER REED ARMY  
INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH IN THE AMOUNT OF APPROXIMATELY  
\$100,000. THE GRANT AND THE SUPPORT FROM WALTER REED

DO NOT COVER SALARIES OF THE FIVE AMERICAN ARMY OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO THE UNIT (A SIXTH, BRITISH, OFFICER IS SUPPORTED BY THE BRITISH ARMY), OR THEIR LOCAL HOUSING, SCHOOL ALLOWANCES, COLA, ETC. SINCE THE INDEPENDENCE OF MALAYA IN 1957 USAMRU HAS OPERATED WITHOUT A FORMAL AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA OR, SINCE 1963, WITH ITS SUCCESSOR, THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA.

2. USAMRU CONCENTRATES ITS RESEARCH EFFORTS ON RICKETTSIAL DISEASES, PARTICULARLY SCRUB TYPHUS WHICH IS ENDEMIC IN MALAYSIA AND EFFECTS VILLAGERS AND SETTLERS IN RURAL AREAS (AND, INCIDENTALLY, ROYAL MALAYSIAN ARMY (RMA) TROOPS ON OPERATIONS AGAINST COMMUNIST INSURGENTS IN JUNGLE AREAS). THIS RESEARCH IS OF GREAT POTENTIAL BENEFIT TO BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND MALAYSIA, AS WELL AS OT OTHER COUNTRIES IN AREAS WHERE SCRUB TYPHUS IS PREVALENT. IN THE OPINION OF THE USAMRU COMMANDER AND OTHERS CONSULTED, CONDITIONS FOR THIS RESEARCH ARE GENERALLY MORE FAVORABLE IN MALAYSIA THAN ELSEWHERE BECAUSE OF UNUSUALLY GOOD COMMUNICATIONS WITH AREAS IN WHICH THE DISEASE IS BEING STUDIED AND A MORE SOPHISTICATED GOVERNMENT HEALTH ESTABLISHMENT THAN IN OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. (IN ADDITION TO USAMRU, THE IMR ALSO INCORPORATES ITS OWN RESEARCH UNITS DEVOTED TO SPECIFIC DISEASES, A UNIT OF THE UNIVERSITY  
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OF CALIFORNIA INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH (HOOPER FOUNDATION), AND IS EXPECTED TO HAVE A NEW UNIT SUPPORTED BY WHO, WHICH WILL ACT AS A REGIONAL CENTER FOR A CAMPAIGN AGAINST TROPICAL DISEASES.)

3. THE EMBASSY AND USAMRU HAVE MADE A NUMBER OF ATTEMPTS TO SECURE EITHER STATUS AS HOME-BASED NON-DIPLOMATIC STAFF FOR THE OFFICERS OF THE USAMRU OR A SPECIAL AGREEMENT TO FORMALIZE ITS POSITION HERE. OUR LAST EFFORT, MADE IN 1975, RESULTED IN A COORDINATED CABINET PAPER CONVEYING A DRAFT AGREEMENT WHICH PRESUMABLY HAD THE SUPPORT OF RELEVANT MINISTRIES (FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE, HEALTH, AND FINANCE). ACCORDING TO A FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE, THE PAPER'S RECOMMENDATION WAS REJECTED IN A CABINET MEETING HELD SOMETIME IN SEPTEMBER 1975, IN WHICH THE ISSUE OF THE POSSIBILITY THAT USAMRU MIGHT BE SECRETLY ENGAGING IN BIOLOGICAL WARFARE WAS RAISED. THEREFORE, USAMRU CONTINUES TO OPERATE, QUITE SUCCESSFULLY AND TO THE BENEFIT OF BOTH COUNTRIES, WITHOUT A FORMAL CHARTER.

4. COMMENT. MALAYSIA, ALTHOUGH A RECIPIENT OF FMS

CREDIT AND IMET ASSISTANCE, HAS SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDED WHAT IT SEES AS FORMAL AGREEMENT FOR STATIONING OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL IN MALAYSIA (I.E. USAMRU) TO AVOID ANY RISK OF TARNISHING ITS NON-ALIGNED IMAGE. FURTHERMORE, AS EVIDENCED IN THE CABINET MEETING, SOME MEMBERS OF THE RULING PARTY ARE SUSPICIOUS OF ALL THE GREAT POWERS, AND ASSUME THAT THE U.S. HAS SOME ULTERIOR MOTIVE IN WANTING THE UNIT HERE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IS EXTREMELY PLEASED WITH THE UNIT'S WORK, AND THERE ARE SIGNS THAT STEPS MAY BE TAKEN TO GIVE IT QUASI-LEGAL STATUS WITHOUT THE FORMALITY OF A STATE-TO-STATE AGREEMENT. (THE CO USAMRU HAS BEEN INFORMED, BUT HAS NOT YET SEEN, A LETTER FROM THE FINANCE MINISTRY TO THE CUSTOMS SERVICE AUTHORIZING

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TAX-FREE IMPORTATION OF LABORATORY AND OTHER EQUIPMENT FOR THE UNIT. IF TRUE, THIS WILL FORMALIZE A PRIVILEGE WHICH HAS BEEN GRANTED IN PRACTICE ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.)

5. THE EMBASSY HAS CO USAMRU BELIEVE THAT THE WORK OF THE UNIT IS APPRECIATED BY THE GOM, AND THAT THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF ITS RESEARCH FULLY JUSTIFY A CONTINUATION OF SUPPORT BY DOD. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE SITUATION HERE WILL EVOLVE TO PERMIT A MORE FORMAL GOM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE UNIT'S EXISTENCE THAN EXISTS AT PRESENT, BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT IS WORTH PRESSING ON THIS ISSUE WHEN THE UNIT IS OPERATING SUCCESSFULLY WITHOUT A FORMAL AGREEMENT.

MILLER

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## Message Attributes

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